

Pest of the Month

Clutterbugs!



Pharoah ants nesting in folder that was stacked with paper. No food, but clutter provided harborage.



Boxes that contained food can still attract ants and cockroaches because the residue left behind.

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Species Description. I am a self-confessed, reforming Clutterbug. Those of us in this group belong to the unscientific and completely made up Family Thrownothingaway-adae, in the Genus Imightneeditlater-us. My particular species is *Cellulosus stackus*. (I ended up with stacks of paper, uncertain of where to file it all.)

Behavior. “I might need it later.” Don’t dump it. Is it possible to change that behavior? I watched Mission Organization and Clean Sweep to learn how professionals clean up. My conclusion is that it’s much easier to toss somebody else’s stuff than your own because it’s all a matter of perspective: what’s important and what’s not.

Having said that, I would like to convince you that it is absolutely imperative to keep clutter to a minimum, not only from a pest perspective, but from an organizational and learning environment perspective. Uncluttering, like pest management, is an on-going process. So remember, “*IPM is a process, not a miracle?*” I propose a corollary: “*Uncluttering is a process, not a miracle.*” The end of the school year is the BEST time to clean out! Here’s my story:

Confessions of a retired school teacher’s daughter. I remember cleaning out my mother’s classroom at the end of the year. She couldn’t stand cockroaches, but they seem to be a way of life in the “naturally ventilated” schools of Hawaii. I remember mouse droppings, too.

Mom taught for 33 years, most of it at one school teaching the 5th grade, but she also taught 3rd and 6th. She taught reading, math, art, social studies and science—almost every year. She accumulated a lot of stuff. But it was organized in cabinets. There was one drawer with scrap paper, right under the paper cutter. Everyday after school, her classroom was swept and the sink cleaned out. The chalkboard was also wiped down and trash cans were emptied. Often by mom.

At the end of the year, we emptied EVERYTHING and wiped down the shelves with warm soapy water in a bucket. We cleaned out cubbies, desks, chalk boards and rails. The paper came off the bulletin boards, the corrugated borders were rolled and salvaged, if they were in good shape, discarded, if not. She didn’t want any place for the cockroaches to hide. She inspected everything for roaches before she packed them away. But she didn’t want to toss everything because budgets were tight, and like you, she was spending out of pocket to keep her students supplied.

She also kept food in her desk. This was before the days of breakfast at school. “I can’t teach them if they’re hungry.” So she fed them. She also used food as prizes, incentives, storing them in the classroom. All food was removed at the end of the year and drawers wiped clean.

Mom taught during the days before plastic containers. Cardboard boxes and baggies (not the Ziploc-type) were the norm. She had a few ratty looking cardboard boxes, but not many because the minute she smelled cockroaches, they were dumped. At the beginning of the school year, we wiped everything down again and re-loaded her cabinets. She kept the roach population in her classroom down by sheer sanitation (and the occasional burst of an aerosol insecticide, no longer allowed).

Continued . . .

By the time she retired, she was converting over to the plastic bins, at her expense. They lasted longer, didn't smell like cockroaches and she could see through them. It wasn't that mom couldn't stand clutter. There was always going to be a degree of chaos in the classroom. That's what happens when you work with kids. She hated the cockroaches and that was her incentive to keep her belongings in order. Intuitively she knew, as I think most of you know, pests like clutter because it provides them a place to live and possibly food and water, too. What more could they want?

My rule? I try and purge at least a file a day. I also file some paper everyday. It helps. Friday is our lab clean out day. One a year we have "the big purge."

Reasons to unclutter:

- *Clutter wastes time.* There just gets to be a point in time when you simply can't be efficient anymore because everything has "gone to random." When you can't find things where they're supposed to be, you hunt, hunting wastes time.

- *Clutter creates a disturbance in "the force".* You know what I mean. (And yes, I'm waiting for Star Wars III.) Clutter is unsettling and doesn't create or maintain a conducive learning environment. Kids need stimulation, but that's different than clutter. If you are distracted by items that flash across your desk, think of what the kids might feel like if they haven't learned to filter unnecessary stimuli.

- *Clutter creates pest harborage.* Pests love dark, undisturbed places. These dark, undisturbed places allow them to reproduce without consequence. The resulting young also have a peaceful place to mature. Hence, the pest life-cycle continues.

- *Clutter creates "untreatable" zones.* Clutter makes pest management almost impossible pesticides (baits) are finally needed. If the pest control technician cannot apply the bait because of clutter, or there is so much clutter and food (as little as grease on a surface, it doesn't have to be a buffet!) that the pest has no reason to come out, treatments will be ineffective.

Mystery of the month . . .

The mystery of the month for May is a question.

Question: So how many baby cockroaches can a female cockroach produce in her life time?

She can produce 4 to 5 egg capsules (ootheca), each containing 30 to 40 eggs, resulting in anywhere from 120 to 200 little cockroaches. Their favorite nesting material is cardboard.

Integrated Pest Management .



For more information about IPM in schools, or to view past issues of the Pest Press, please visit <http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu>

Meet the McNair "Unclutter" Champs:

The "unclutter" Champs of McNair Magnet School include: . They completely reorganized their stockroom, dumping cardboard boxes (lf) and organizing cans for use on a "first in, first out" basis.



Nov. 2004. Lots of cardboard and clutter



April 2005. Almost no cardboard. Floors clean, too.



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